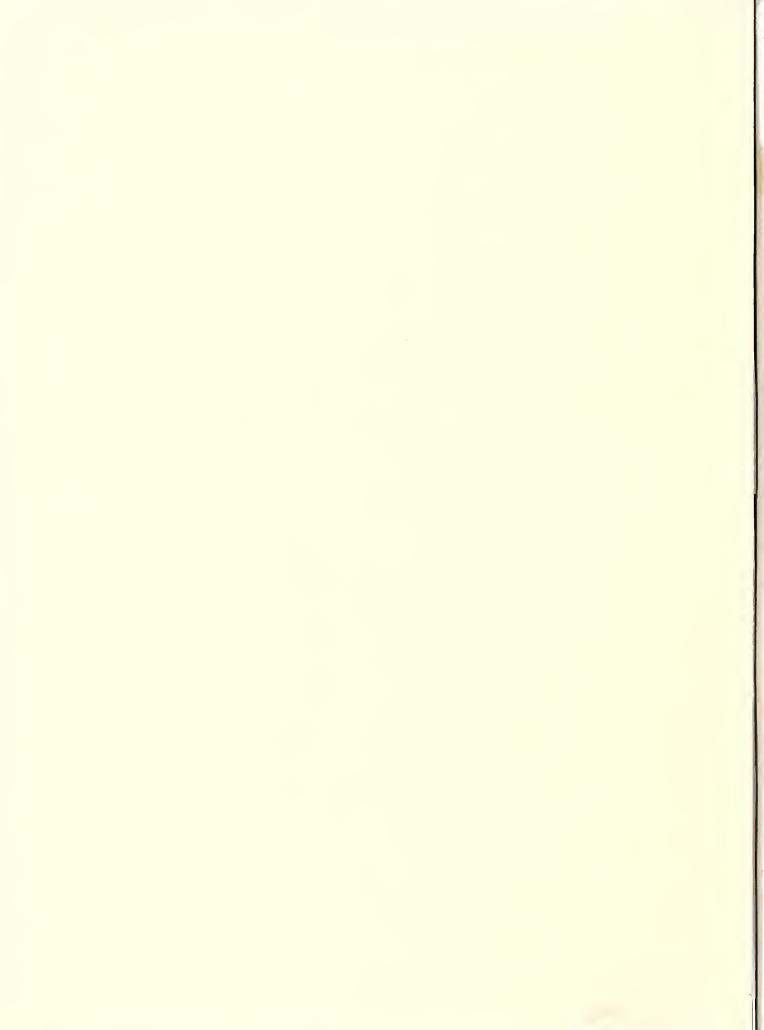
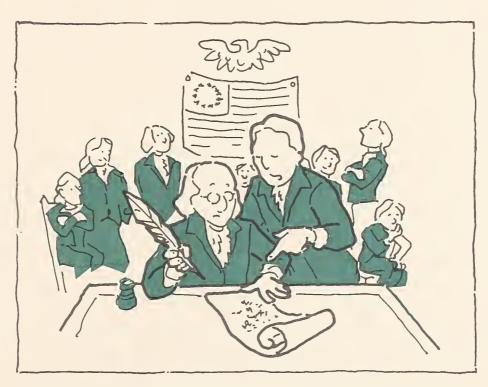
Historic, Archive Document

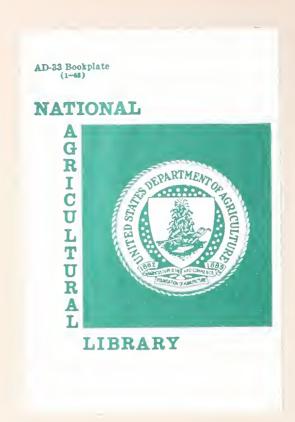
Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.



Improving Communications and Working Relationships



"Let's change 'Us Guys' to 'We The People."



"This report is dedicated to the men and women of the U. S. D. A. Forest Service.

Sincere thanks to all who shared in this effort."

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Forest Service Washington Office 14th & Independence SW P.O. Box 96090 Washington, D.C. 20090-6090

Reply to: 1600 Information Services Date: February 6, 1991

Subject: Final report of the Committee on External Communications

To: All Employees



Last May 18 I commissioned the Committee on External Communications to study our current programs and recommend ways we could improve our effectiveness. This final report was presented to Chief and Staff by the committee on December 12, 1990, and to the Regional Foresters and Directors on January 15. Reception by these groups was enthusiastic. The report, "Improving Communications and Working Relationships," and its recommendations were accepted. In transmitting this copy of the final report to you, I want to add my personal endorsement. Much of the implementation must happen at the national level. We will be discussing this more in the coming weeks. However, everything the report contains falls within our current legal authority. Many of these recommendations can be implemented by regions, stations, forests, districts, and individuals without further direction. Examples include:

- Training and professional development for PAOs and line officers.
- Assessing the organizational position of the PAO and integrating it into the policy and decision-making processes of the agency.
- Development and systematic use of opinion leader lists and networks as a primary communications method.
- Emphasizing two-way communication with the public at your level.
- Making a greater effort to explain the context and rationale for decisions and policies in ways that our customers can understand.

In these and many other areas, field units and individuals should seize the initiative for improvement. Over the last 7 years, several teams have examined the critical area of communications. This report builds on all that previous work. Now it is time to put this analysis into action. I urge each of you to read this report and consider how the recommendations relate to you. Then I hope you will act to improve our collective ability to communicate with the public. This is vital to our future success.

F. DALE ROBERTSON

Chief



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Comments From Participants

Chief – Before you read the core of this report, some thoughts from folks who participated in this effort:

"We have studied our communications to death! It's time to get on with it!"

"We need to have realistic expectations of our communications efforts. If this was easy, it would have been solved a long time ago!"

"Agreement on values is hoping for too much. Individuals have values; organizations have traditions and rules of acceptable behavior."

"What we're searching for is informed consent — not consensus!"

"Well managed internal communications should reinforce acceptable behaviors and be a meaningful two-way communications link between the organization and its employees."

"We need to raise external communications to the level of a major organizational goal."

"Open internal forums for information exchange should be encouraged."

"We need to simplify — missions, values, visions, strategies, charters, perspectives and slogans just blow my mind."

"Many organizations have a mission statement, but people aren't eommitted to it because they aren't involved in developing it."

"Low trust results in closed communications, little problem solving and poor cooperation and teamwork."

"Success is 90 percent doing a good job and 10 percent telling about it."

"We need to identify leaders among underrepresented professional and media organizations who can and are willing to interact and dialogue."

"If you really want to help people change, empathize with them."

"Transforming Forest Service communications will require major changes in the way we do business at all levels. It must be more than window dressing. It will require significant behavioral changes within the Agency."

What We Learned

Many Forest Service people and folks outside the Service feel an urgent need to <u>build better relationships</u> and to improve our <u>communications</u>.

It will require a determined, sustained commitment to make this happen because it requires <u>changes</u> in the way we <u>think and act</u>.

Improving <u>internal communications</u> is the first priority, because we can't do a first class job externally unless all Forest Service employees have the "right stuff."

Internally, we need more <u>two-way communications</u> throughout the Service.

We need closer <u>teamwork</u> within the Forest Service that's based on <u>trust</u>, <u>respect and timely sharing of accurate information</u>.

A huge amount of <u>good work</u> is done by dedicated Forest Service people. Our people need to <u>hear more about</u> our <u>successes</u> and share in the <u>pride</u> of this outstanding public service.

We need to improve our <u>orientation program</u> for new employees (including seniors, volunteers and part-time) and <u>require</u> its <u>timely application</u> on all units.

<u>Communications training</u> and <u>evaluation</u> needs to be <u>beefed up and required</u> for all <u>managers</u> and <u>Public Affairs staff</u>.

<u>Every person</u> in the Forest Service (including senior citizens and volunteers) should be equipped with an <u>appropriate level of information</u> so that they can help in the effort to <u>communicate</u> with our publics.

We are swept up in a time of <u>historic change</u> and it will take an <u>extra</u> <u>effort</u> to keep Forest Service employees and our publics <u>informed</u> about <u>how</u> <u>we are adjusting</u> to <u>change</u> and <u>why</u>.

In this time of <u>changing values and public expectations</u>, we need to update our <u>Mission</u>, <u>Strategy</u> and <u>Vision</u> statements and work hard to communicate them.

Forest Service "<u>frontliners</u>" (receptionists, information technicians, volunteer hosts, Visitor Information Services staff, law enforcement officers, etc.) are of <u>critical importance</u> to our total communications effort. They need <u>increased support</u> in terms of improved training, tenure and, in some cases, pay.

To strengthen <u>working relationships</u>, we need to do a better job of listening and to reemphasize our <u>one-on-one</u> contacts no matter how busy we are.

We need to take the time to <u>consult</u> with our traditional partners and other key folks <u>before</u> we make the big <u>decisions</u>.

What We Learned, cont.

There are other opportunities to improve our communications, but there is no "Silver Bullet." We recommend concentrating on a few fundamental problems and opportunities. Our objective should be to make solid, visible progress on these items; and when we are satisfied with our progress, then we can look to other areas.

You will note that we have steered away from recommending certain technologies to improve our communications. There are some wonderful technological tools and a very good body of knowledge related to public relations that is available. We have some top public affairs professionals in the Forest Service and excellent outside consultants. We need to draw on this talent!

You will also notice that the Committee has consciously avoided recommendations for implementing the "Actions" in this Report until they have your approval. We see implementation as a separate step. However, we strongly recommend the direct involvement of Forest Supervisors in the implementation phase because many of the Actions are a direct result of their comments at the Sunbird Conference (11/13/89).

Strategies and Actions

Here are five strategies and recommended actions that will move us in the right direction:

I. FOREST SERVICE MISSION, STRATEGY AND VISION: Every member of the Forest Service will have a clear understanding of our Mission, Strategy and Vision and will use this understanding to guide their day-to-day work, and to be able to adequately describe it to the public.

- A. <u>Assemble all</u> current, <u>national level statements</u> which relate to Forest Service Mission, Vision, Strategy, Values, Charter and Slogans. <u>Engage the work force in updating and consolidating these statements to focus the Forest Service Mission</u>, <u>Strategy</u> and <u>Vision</u>.
- B. <u>Develop a standardized program</u> that explains these clarified statements and <u>present it to</u> the <u>entire Forest Service</u> work force, including senior citizens, volunteers and temporary employees.
- C. <u>Encourage localized versions</u> of <u>Strategies</u> and <u>Visions</u> that speak to the <u>uniqueness</u> of the unit. Direct line officers to <u>assure</u> that <u>localized versions</u> <u>are supportive</u> of National statements.
- D. <u>Require new employee orientation</u> and make the presentation and discussion of Forest Service Mission, Strategy and Vision a prominent part of that training.
- E. <u>Develop</u> a <u>standardized regional level training</u> program <u>similar to the National Management Policy Seminars</u> to increase understanding of how and why the Forest Service operates as it does.

II. INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS: Within the Forest Service, we will improve teamwork and cooperation based on open two-way communications, timely sharing of accurate information and recognition of top communicators.

- A. Require first line supervisors to discuss issues and critical information with their employees on a timely basis. Make this task a specific part of the supervision performance element and closely monitor accomplishment.
- B. <u>Improve feedback mechanisms</u> to line officers and managers by utilizing "sounding boards" of employees, listening sessions, informal networks, "team think," and other innovative means.
- C. Recognize that a wide range of personal values exists and is healthy in a multicultural work force. At times these values will lead to dissent. Establish a clear policy to help employees and supervisors constructively address situations involving internal dissension.
 - D. <u>Provide</u> appropriate <u>recognition</u> and <u>rewards</u> for top communicators.
- E. Make a special effort to <u>communicate the rationale and context</u> of Forest Service policy and decisions to all employees.
- F. Evaluate our current internal communications tools: Chief and Staff Notes; Friday Newsletter; Daily News Digest, and Regional, local and staff newsletters. Eliminate, consolidate, or refocus as necessary.
- G. <u>Communicate positive accomplishments</u> of a multicultural Forest Service work force and generate pride.
- H. <u>Improve</u> methods of <u>communicating sensitive information</u> to promote teamwork in managing critical issues.
- I. <u>Formalize and require a transition process</u> to facilitate communications between line and key staff officers and those designated to replace them at the time of transfer, retirement, etc.

III. EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS: Skilled external communications will be viewed as a valuable part of our overall effort because it is the foundation for building trust and supportive working relationships.

- A. Strengthen and promote the idea that <u>every Forest Service person</u> <u>has</u> a <u>responsibility to build trust and relationships</u> through effective communications with the public.
- B. <u>Develop special training</u> opportunities for Forest Service "<u>frontliners</u>" who work directly with the public. (See *Training Proposal for Forest Service Technicians* Clemson University.)
- C. Search for ways to increase <u>tenure and capability</u> of Forest Service "<u>frontliners</u>" through improved career ladders.
- D. <u>Require opinion leader lists</u>, including underrepresented groups, at every organizational level. Stress the importance of <u>maintaining frequent</u> <u>contact</u> with opinion leaders. <u>Reemphasize "spittin" and whittlin"</u> and two-way communications on a regular basis.
- E. <u>Emphasize and reward community involvement</u> by Forest Service employees.
- F. <u>Require</u> coordinated, <u>targeted communications plans</u> that focus on a few salient themes and which include provisions for evaluation at all organizational levels. Stress <u>integrated National Forest Service</u>, <u>State and Private Forestry and Research communications</u>.
- G. Broaden and <u>coordinate communication</u>s flowing from <u>Interpretive</u> <u>Environmental Education</u> and <u>Visitor Information Services</u>.
- H. Require <u>public involvement</u> in decision-making at all levels, with special emphasis at the <u>project level</u>. Public involvement strategies should <u>focus on true dialogue and development of informed consent</u>.
- I. Make a greater effort to demonstrate and <u>explain the rationale of our decisions and policies</u> in a way our customers can understand.
- J. <u>Build on the success</u> of Challenge Cost Share, Stewardship, Land Management Planning, and other efforts <u>that promote dialogue</u>, <u>ownership</u> and stronger <u>working relationships</u>.
- K. <u>Strengthen and coordinate</u> external communications with universities and other Federal and State natural resource agencies.
- L. Through efforts like "New Perspectives," <u>actively demonstrate</u> the benefits and trade-offs of <u>Multiple Use</u>. Show people we value the things that are important to them.

IV. COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS (PA) PROFES-SIONALISM AND SKILLS: The communications and PA efforts of the Forest Service will be based on professionalism and a high degree of modern public affairs skills. These skills will be fully utilized to meet the public's need for timely and relevant information, to build strong working relationships and to support the Forest Service mission.

- A. <u>Develop and standardize</u> basic communications and PA <u>training</u> <u>requirements</u> for managers and PA professionals that will provide needed knowledge, skills and abilities.
- B. <u>Update</u> the <u>publications</u>, *Public Affairs Skills for the Developing Manager* and *Professional Development Guide for the Public Affairs Officer* and use them as the basic skill guides for managers and Public Affairs Officers.
- C. As soon as feasible, <u>make basic communications and PA training mandatory</u> and <u>require it as a prerequisite</u> to holding managerial and PA positions.
- D. Work with the Office of Personnel Management to <u>strengthen</u> <u>qualifications and standards</u> for the 1035 series to <u>require a professional background</u>.
- E. Place a higher priority on communications and PA proficiencies in the <u>evaluation and selection</u> of managers.
- F. Managers and PA specialists at all levels work together to <u>develop a division</u> of <u>labor matrix</u> that will help to <u>define roles and</u> responsibilities.
- G. Foster appreciation and recognition of the <u>body of knowledge PA</u> <u>professionals</u> are capable of providing. Promote <u>teamwork</u> between managers and PA specialists to gain <u>greater use</u> of this knowledge.

V. FOCUS AND EFFICIENCY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS: Communications and PA efforts will be fully integrated into the decision process at all levels. Most work will focus on coordinated, well planned objectives followed by evaluation.

- A. Assure that PA specialists are full members of the management teams, involved in the decision making process and held <u>accountable</u> for meaningful participation.
- B. Evaluate managers' use of PA expertise and hold them accountable for meeting their communications and PA responsibilities.
- C. Design and implement <u>organizational</u> structures that <u>promote</u> <u>teamwork</u> and <u>full participation</u> between top managers and PA specialists. For example, consider making PA in the Washington Office a Senior Executive responsibility reporting directly to the Chief. Similar organizations with PA specialists reporting directly to a key line officer may be desirable at other levels of the Forest Service.
- D. <u>Achieve</u> reasonable <u>consistency in PA staffing and career ladders</u> at Regional, Station and Forest levels. Support <u>upgraded PA staffing</u> on <u>complex Forests</u> and <u>adding PA staffing on complex Ranger Districts</u>.
- E. Design methods to obtain current <u>public attitudes and feedback</u> on <u>key issues</u> as a basis for developing PA plans. For example, utilize the Extension Service authority for surveys and/or analyze Washington Office controlled correspondence.
- F. Require top line officers at all levels to approve annual <u>PA</u> objectives, strategies and campaigns. The <u>Chief</u> should coordinate and <u>control</u> national <u>initiatives</u>.
- G. Require managers at all levels to develop and implement <u>public</u> <u>affairs plans</u> that are <u>supportive of national communications objectives</u>.
- H. Develop PA <u>strategies and compaigns</u> that are <u>focused</u> on <u>specific</u> objectives and behavioral changes. <u>Provide</u> adequate <u>funding to implement</u>.
- I. Routinely <u>evaluate the effectiveness</u> of communications and PA campaigns. Build on successful efforts.
- J. Establish and support <u>national sign</u> and <u>logo standards</u> to promote Forest Service identity and reduce public confusion.

Supporting Discussions

I. MISSION, STRATEGY, AND VISION

Common themes identified by employees, Forest Supervisors, and external commentators were:

- Lack of clear understanding and articulation of the basic Forest Service Mission, Strategy and Vision hinders effective communication.
- This was the most frequently raised issue by all three groups employees, Forest Supervisors and external reviewers. It was also given the highest priority for resolution. Typical comments were:

"Until the Forest Service can better describe what it stands for as an agency, no amount of effort in internal and external communications will be successful.

"Not many folks really know where we are heading...the result is that folks hesitate and give the impression of confusion."

- Many Forest Supervisors and external groups called upon the Forest Service top leadership to develop and articulate the Mission, Strategy and Vision of the Agency. The employee group seemed particularly interested in being involved in the process with the leadership. Yet, at the same time, a small number of participants felt that legislation and policy provided the necessary direction for the Agency and that "confusion" or "ambiguity" really was disagreement over priorities and values.
- Some commentors suggested basic elements be addressed in the issue, including "stewardship"; sustainability of all products, services, and values; management of plant and animal communities to achieve multiple purpose objectives; maintenance or protection of all parts of natural ecosystems; and work force diversity.

Discussion

That so many feel so strongly about the need to address the Forest Service mission is reason enough to give the issue serious attention. A shared sense of mission is essential to our collective efforts to improve communications.

Given our complex mandates, we need (for both our work force and those who deal with us) a "North Star" — a sense of purpose that provides a guide and check for decisions, positions, programs and crisis responses. This framework also provides a single corporate identity.

Forest Service employees must have a sense of ownership in any mission, strategy and vision articulated by the leadership.

II. INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

Common themes identified by employees, Forest Supervisors and external commentors were:

- Internal eoordination must be improved, at all levels, in order to eonvey eonsistent, accurate information to the public
- Before we can provide a consistent message to the public, we must get our own internal communications house in order. Internal and external communications are closely linked.
- Information overload is a problem. Getting the right information to the right people in a timely fashion is an ongoing ehallenge.
- Internal communications must be two-way, allowing for field personnel, retirees and other members of the Forest Service community to provide honest feedback to the leadership.
- Good internal eommunications provide the basis for improved teamwork and the resolution of eonfliet.

Discussion

We must manage the technology so that it improves our internal communications. Technology has the potential to greatly enhance internal eommunications, but can never substitute for personal eommunications. We must remember that most employees prefer to get their information face-to-face from a person they eonsider eredible, usually their immediate supervisor.

III. EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

All groups felt that Forest Service external communications should:

- Become more effective at framing issues from the agency's perspective.
- Be two-way, by meaningfully seeking and trying to understand the views of others.
- Avoid being fragmented along functional and activity lines. External communications should be effectively coordinated and internally consistent.
- Be effectively targeted to those individuals, groups and opinion leaders who are in a position to influence the success or failure of Forest Service programs.
- Be sensitive to changing values which affect our diverse work force, the public and those who are in positions of influence over Forest Service programs.
- Be based on comprehensive strategy rather than simply reacting to events.
- Bc closely coordinated with a greatly increased conservation education effort.

Discussion

Before public communications can be substantially improved, the Forest Service must, at all levels, resolve that effectiveness in public communications is as important as anything else the agency docs, and must demonstrate that resolve by committing the resources necessary to do the job.

In some cases this will require major behavioral changes. A prerequisite for the organization to change is the active support and endorsement by the agency leadership.

IV. COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALISM AND SKILLS

Common themes identified by employees, Forest Service and external commentors were:

- PA offices are often being used to distribute information on decisions already made. In many cases, they have not been involved in the decision from the beginning.
 - The top PA officer of any unit is the line officer.
- A manager's ability to effectively communicate with the public should be given higher priority when considering training and/or performance evaluation.

Discussion

Line managers need a working knowledge of Public Affairs. This has become one of the single most important characteristics a manager should have.

Similarly, we should employ only top quality Public Affairs professionals. To do this, we must develop a career path which addresses such issues as recruitment, selection, Public Affairs training and development, socialization into the Forest Service organizational culture, and career ladders. We must also address the relationship between and among line officers and Public Affairs professionals so that the Public Affairs perspective is an integral part of the decision process.

V. FOCUS AND EFFICIENCY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Common themes were:

- Public Affairs programs which are disjointed, uncoordinated, and internally competitive do more harm than good.
- The information we present to the public should focus more on common themes that explain and support the overall Forest Service mission rather than separate functional programs.
- There should be a strong linkage between external communications, Visitor Information Services and conservation education.
- Public Affairs officers are not part of the management team on many field units, even though there is a correlation between this and the success the unit has in carrying out its resource management program.
 - Public Affairs skill levels on many units need major improvement.

Discussion

The Public Affairs program direction must shift from being focused on individual activities and resource areas, to being a targeted approach, where the emphasis is on reaching clearly identified audiences with well-planned messages. It must also focus on building quality relationships with those members of the public who are active and influential on Forest Service issues.

Brochures, newsletters and videos may be a part of an objective-driven approach, but should not be an end, in and of themselves. We should deemphasize general purpose activities which aren't tied to specific objectives or a target audience.

Definition of Terms

Employees' verbal comments at four workshops and numerous written comments indicate that the meaning of the terms mission, strategy and vision vary from person to person.

The definitions used by the Committee in this report are:

Mission

A broad statement of an organization's reason for being.

The foundation of the Forest Service mission is defined by various laws enacted by the U. S. Congress and by Executive Orders of the President.

Strategy

The framework which guides those choices that determine the nature and direction of an organization (Tregoe & Zimmerman, 1980).

At the national level, the Resources Planning Act (RPA) Statement of Policy and the Program represent Forest Service strategy. At the National Forest level, the Forest Land and Resource Management Plan represents the strategy for that Forest. Region, Station and local strategies may also be developed in support of the national strategy.

Vision

The image of actually achieving the mission through the implementation of the strategy (Edge, 1987).

The vision personalizes the mission and strategy to the level of the individual unit, manager, and/or employee.

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Excellent support to this project was provided by Jackson Jackson and Wagner consultants, and especially by Pat Jackson.

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- U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Southern Region. [n.d.] Public affairs skills for the developing manager. Atlanta. 6 p.

¹ Administrative documents available in Public Affairs Office, USDA Forest Service, Auditors Building, 201 14th Street, S.W. at Independence Ave., S.W., Washington, DC 20250.







